

1 TIMOTHY
November 27, 2022

1 Timothy 3:8-13

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. ¹

“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”

As we work our way through the verses and teachings from Paul’s first letter to Timothy, we once again come to the passage that we always go to when ordaining and calling men to serve as deacons in our church.

While it has been preached before here at First Baptist...most recently this past spring when we ordained Austin Libal as a deacon, to ensure we are covering the depths of this letter fully we will once again look to the calling, requirements, and the office of deacon within the church.

Mike did a wonderful job on a challenging passage regarding qualifications for pastors, elders, and overseers last Sunday. The office of pastor (whether called pastor, elder, or overseer) is one of the offices in the church defined by scripture.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (1 Ti 3:8–13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

When we speak of offices in the church, we are speaking of positions of leadership. Yet, the New Testament speaks of leaders given to the church that lie outside the short list given to Timothy.

In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes:

Ephesians 4:11-14

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ²

To the church in Corinth, he writes:

1 Corinthians 12:28

²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ³

I have spoken of the positions of apostles and prophets at different times and while the position was authentic and needed in the early days of the church, the qualifications required to use such titles no longer exist today. Thus, those who choose to use such titles are doing so outside of biblical authority.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Eph 4:11–14). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (1 Co 12:28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

As for the title evangelist, that is still used and we know men who serve under such title and have brought messages to our congregation in the past.

With that being said, it should be noted that these titles of positional leadership do not fall under the called offices within the local body of a church. One reason is that such positions then, and with evangelist now, these roles are not tied or limited to a local congregation.

Thus, apostles were those men who had been called by God, had been eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ, commissioned by Christ himself, and were given to the church as a foundational office of the church during its early years and prior to the canonization of scripture.

Prophets are not mentioned much at all in the era of the early church. Most references, other than what I read from Paul's letter, are found in the book of Acts. What was their function? To proclaim God's word to his people. This was crucial in the early days of the church as the believers did not have the New Testament before them to read and study as they were living it out.

Evangelist is only found three times in the New Testament. Most likely these New Testament era evangelists were those who traveled with prophets and apostles and were focused upon the proclaiming of the good news so that the lost would be saved.

All biblical. All for a season. All for the glory of God and the good of the church, but not offices within the local body.

There are two established offices in the New Testament church. These are identified in this letter to Timothy and affirmed elsewhere. They are pastor (overseer, elder, shepherd) and deacon. I will not get into the details regarding the pastoral office in the church as Mike did so well last week.

I am following God's lead to focus now on the second office – that of deacon.

Growing up a Baptist, deacons were part of what it meant to be a church. We joined numerous churches throughout my childhood as we moved around the nation, but each was a Baptist church and each had a pastor and a group of deacons.

My dad is a deacon and it seems in my memory he has served in every church where we were members.

As a kid growing up in the church, here's what I knew about deacons. They were a group of mostly older men who handed out the Lord's Supper elements and met monthly at the church.

I didn't know much else.

As I grew into my teenage years and young adulthood, I paid more attention to when the church would vote on men to serve as deacons. I remember having ballots. One church had a piece of paper they handed out with every man over the age of eighteen printed on it and we were select twelve (I think it was twelve – that sounds like a biblical number) to serve.

Honestly, we were a church that ran about 115 each Sunday and it seemed there were about 80 names on that list. I was only in junior high, but something didn't seem right, especially since some of those guys hadn't been in church in years and some only showed up once a month during softball season so they could be on the team.

Baptist life.

I learned much over the years. I have learned there are godly men in churches throughout the world who have been called by God, affirmed by their local church, and serve faithfully and with integrity within the

body. There are many men such as this and we are blessed to have some here at FBCOP.

I also learned that there are some guys who are deacons, but likely should never have been ordained, have since disqualified themselves, or have become so overly negative, mean-spirited, and divisive their church should enact discipline upon them.

That is tragic, but perhaps we (the church) are to blame for this? Perhaps we, as pastors, are to blame. For there is often a presumption that is held regarding church polity that is not valid.

A membership class can explain our polity, our ordinances, and our understanding of scripture. While church members get it and affirm it, we are human and there are times we simply forget it.

So, what is this office of deacon that Paul writes of?

THE DEACON IS A GIFT TO THE CHURCH

This is a good reminder that the position of deacon was not created by man to give certain members a title, but was created by God as a gift to the church as the need for such arose. When, in God's timing he saw fit to reveal such a position, he did.

Acts 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵And what they said pleased the whole

gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. ⁴

I believe the first instance of deacons being set apart in the church is what I just read from book of Acts. In Acts 6 there was a division growing among the saints. Shocking, huh?

Seven men were called out and set apart to ensure all the widows in the Jerusalem church received enough food. Why were they needed? Because the apostles were being asked to manage these disputes and not unlike Moses who initially tried to judge all disputes among the people of Israel, these apostles were being distracted with this important issue and thereby not able to focus on the more important issue.

Paul stated prior in this letter to the pastor...

1 Timothy 1:3

³As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,⁵

Then...

1 Timothy 2:1

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ⁶

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ac 6:1–7). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (1 Ti 1:3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (1 Ti 2:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

This affirms the writing of Luke in the Acts of Apostles when the church called out seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, to serve within the body to ensure that disunity among the family not gain a foothold and grow. These men served the practical needs of the widows and the church members so that the more important could continue to be done.

Yes, the more important. That offends some who have so drifted away from the understanding of a biblical worldview with a doctrinal foundation on the inerrant Word. Yes – prayer and ministry of the Word of God is more vital to the health of the local church than the caring for widows and practical needs of members. Those are not unimportant (or Acts 6 would not exist) but they are not the most important. Paul affirms this in his letter to Timothy.

The local church in Ephesus had two office, just as the local church does today and has throughout history – the office of pastor/elder/overseer and the office of deacon.

Both are gifts to the church by God.

THE DEACON IS SERVANT TO THE CHURCH

This great gift of a deacon is a high calling to a low position. Not every man can be a deacon. Not every man can remain a deacon. Not every man is owed the office simply because he fits a few criteria.

The deacon is the ultimate servant of the Lord within the local body. A deacon in a church on the other side of town has no role within this local church.

This is a familial role.

Most here at FBC now understand that deacons are not pastors. Deacons are not overseers. Deacons are not elders.

Yet, in many churches they drift toward those functions.

In some churches the deacon body becomes a board of directors, business managers, report gatherers, financial approvers, grounds crew, or any other baptized business position, but in each case, that is an unbiblical role given to a biblical position. And when that happens the church who has allowed it should repent.

In the past few decades as leadership has become a genre with books, classes, and online courses giving insight, the term “servant-leader” has become popular – especially among Christians.

Thus, deacons are “servant leaders.” Let’s “lead like Jesus” and follow his model.

Let me encourage us to stop watering down the very thing Christ has called us to be by adding business terminology to allow others to feel good about our calling.

God has not called our deacons, or any of us for that matter, to be servant leaders. He has called us to be servants. Period. To add “leader” to the term sucks everything from the word servant to make it more palatable in a culture that thrives on positional authority and celebrity.

The men in Acts called to serve...served.

Were they leaders? Certainly, but not because they sought to lead. They were examples of godliness.

Who were some self-proclaimed leaders in the early church? Perhaps Hymenaeus and Alexander? Not role-models.

THE DEACON UNITES THE CHURCH

The early church was fracturing. This has been the sin-nature of humans since Eden and our enemy fuels this. Disunity is easy. Gripping is natural.

Frowns are plentiful. Hurt feelings are normal. This is how humanity has been and continues to be. Deacons do the work of unity for the sake of Christ.

So, God gave his church a gift. The gift to help the pastors lead and the members to grow. The gift to keep the forgotten remembered. The gift to ensure servanthood within the body remains true. The gift of men qualified and called to bless God, bless his church, and allow the main thing to remain the main thing...all for the glory of God.

The qualifications in Paul's letter for such men remain. Pray now for the servants who serve in a low office for a high calling. To God be the glory!